

The sleeper in fast food

TAKE THE QUIZ BELOW AND LEARN HOW MUCH SODIUM YOUR NEXT 'HEALTHY' LUNCH MAY BE HIDING

LET'S SAY YOUR DOCTOR HAS TOLD YOU TO go on a low-sodium diet. That means you're trying to stay under 1,500 milligrams of sodium per day (or under 600 mg per meal). You've had a good breakfast, but now it's lunchtime, and you're hungry. You need something quick to eat right now. So you enter the fast-food world of convenient gastronomy. You figure, "I'll just go to [enter your favorite fast-food restaurant name here] and get a salad with grilled chicken." But is that really the healthy option?

You may be surprised. It turns out that while menu items promoted as healthy may indeed be lower in calories, fat and carbs than other options, they're sometimes loaded with salt. Think back: When have you heard fast-food commercials talk about their foods' low sodium content? Finding a nutrition guide at a restau-

rant can be difficult, so we've prepared this quiz to see if you can guess which foods are truly better options. Rank these items from lowest (#1) to highest (#4) in sodium content, and then turn the page for the answers—and some useful tips on watching your lunchtime sodium intake.



_____ Wendy's Mandarin Chicken Salad with Oriental Sesame Dressing

_____ Burger King Tendergrill Chicken Sandwich

_____ McDonald's Chicken Selects Premium Breast Strips (3 pieces)

_____ Hardee's Low-Carb Charbroiled Chicken Club Sandwich

25 secrets for healthy flavor

Watching your sodium? Never fear—there are many ways besides salt to make a meal tastier. Don't limit yourself to just one spice; explore wonderful gastronomic pleasures by combining some of the elements below to create different taste combinations, such as fruity and hot, sweet and sour, tart and spicy.

balsamic vinegar, dark and white

candied ginger, chopped

carrot, grated

celery seed

chipotles, flaked

curry leaves

ginger, grated fresh

herbs, fresh chopped (basil, dill, thyme, rosemary, tarragon, mint)

horseradish

juniper berries

lemon juice

lemon zest

lime juice

lime zest

mustard seeds, yellow, black

nuts (salt-free), finely chopped

onion flakes, dehydrated

orange zest

pepper, fresh cracked

red pepper flakes

roasted red peppers (roasted at home)

seeds of paradise

sesame seeds

vinegars, flavored

wasabi powder



Quiz answers

and strategies for limiting sodium

Here's how sodium content ranks in the four fast-food choices in our quiz on the previous page. You'll note that the target of 600 milligrams per meal is one all four entrants miss by a mile. (Nutritional information retrieved from the nutritional guide on each restaurant's web page.)

1 **1,010 mg sodium: McDonald's 3-piece Chicken Selects Premium Breast Strips** (400 calories, 24 grams fat, 23 g carbs); www.mcdonalds.com

The McDonald's menu has some seemingly healthy options, with salads and grilled-chicken options, but even though they appear to be lower in calories and fat grams, there's quite a bit of hidden sodium. The trick is to find out where you can cut sodium. Compare the 3-piece Chicken Breast Strips with the 4-piece Chicken McNuggets. The fried nuggets are actually a better choice, with fewer calories (190) and less fat (12 grams), carbs (11 g) and sodium (400 mg)—provided you don't use dipping sauce.

Then there are the salads: Hold the butter garlic croutons! They add 140 mg sodium in just a ½-oz serving. The salad dressings are also a high-sodium culprit. A packet of Newman's Own salad dressing adds from 340 mg (Creamy Southwest) to 730 mg (Low-Fat Balsamic Vinaigrette) sodium, depending on what flavor you select. Instead, use only half the packet or bring your own low-sodium dressing. It's not too convenient carrying around a big bottle of salad dressing in your car, so here's an idea: mix your salad dressing at home and carry a reasonable portion in a snack-size zipper plastic bag. If you can go without chicken and dressing, the Premium Southwest Salad has only 140 calories, 4.5 g fat, 20 g carbs and 150 mg sodium. Another reasonable alternative is the Fruit 'n Yogurt Parfait with granola (160 calories, 2 g fat, 31 carbs, 85 mg sodium).

2 **1,220 mg sodium: Burger King Tendergrill Chicken Sandwich** (490 calories, 21 g fat, 51 g carbs); www.bk.com

Would you believe that at Burger King, a Triple Whopper sandwich with mayo has less sodium (1,170 mg) than a grilled chicken sandwich? Perhaps typical of a trend in fast food, the grilled chicken has a high sodium content, nearly exceeding the daily total suggested intake for people watching their sodium. A 5-piece Crown Shaped Chicken Tenders has less than half the sodium at 380 mg, and it is not a bad choice if you're also watching calories, fat and carbs (230 calories, 13 g fat, 16 g carbs). Surprisingly, a pair of BK Burger Shots is another possibility (220 calories, 10 g fat, 18 carbs, 420 g sodium).

3 **1,250 mg sodium: Wendy's Mandarin Chicken Salad w/Oriental Sesame Dressing** (550 calories, 25.5 g fat, 49 carbs); www.wendys.com

Each of the four Wendy's salads exceeds 1,000 mg of sodium, with the Oriental being second only to the Chicken Caesar. The chicken and the dressing are again the main sources of sodium. If you need dressing, the Fat-Free French has only 170 mg sodium (70 calories, 0 g fat, 17 g carbs). It may surprise you that the baked potato is a reasonable alternative. Its 270 calories, 0 g fat, 61 g carbs, and 25 mg sodium for a 10-oz. spud are pretty low for fast food. If you opt for the Sour Cream & Chive potato, it's still a reasonable choice (320 calories, 3.5 g fat, 63 g carbs, and 50 mg sodium).

4 **1,290 mg sodium: Hardee's Low-Carb Charbroiled Chicken Club Sandwich** (360 calories, 23 g fat, 14 g carbs); www.hardees.com

Just watch a Hardee's commercial and you can guess that they don't target consumers who watch their waistlines. The chain's nutrition guide lists fewer healthy options than other fast-food restaurants. The closest item to a salad here is a "small serving" of cole slaw with 140 mg sodium. A healthier lunch alternative to the Low-Carb Charbroiled Chicken Club Sandwich is a Small Hamburger with 140 calories, 15 grams fat, 32 g carbs, and 500 mg sodium. ■

Other fast-food choices in Sanford

A rule of thumb for fast-food restaurants in general? The salads can be a reasonable option if you hold the chicken and use your own low-sodium dressing. Oddly, the fried chicken options had slightly less sodium than the "healthier" grilled counterparts. Here are some other lower-sodium options (under 600 mg) at some of Sanford's fast food restaurants—provided that you don't add any condiments or cheese, "supersize" or order a side dish:

- **Sonic Corn Dog**—530 mg sodium (210 calories, 11 grams fat)
- **DQ Grilled Chicken Wrap**—450 mg sodium (200 calories, 12 g fat)
- **KFC Grilled Chicken Breast**—440 mg sodium (180 calories, 4 g fat) or Drumstick—200 mg sodium (70 calories, 4 g fat)
- **Bojangles Cajun Filet Sandwich, no mayo**—401 mg sodium (337 calories, 11 g fat, 41 g carbs) or a Cajun Spiced Thigh—465 mg sodium (310 calories, 23 g fat, 11 carbs)